



## How to Smooth the Return to the Office

A guide to safeguarding your employees' mental health, reducing churn, and increasing productivity as your people transition from working from home back to the office.



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**At Plumm, we partner with progressive businesses to increase productivity, combat burnout and boost team morale.**

We do this through the delivery of strategies and services that improve mental wellbeing and help combat stress.

The pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on all our lives. None more so than in the world of work, which has experienced huge upheaval as a result of employees moving from the office to the isolation of their homes.

As people start to return to the office, there are **two key challenges** that organisations will likely face:

CHALLENGE NO.1

**The mental toll that working from home has had on your workforce**

CHALLENGE NO.2

**The introspection that has taken place while at home that may have led some staff to consider leaving**

**In this guide we will explore ways in which you can smooth the transition back to the office and create a supportive environment that will reduce the likelihood of any potential negative impact.**



## Change is Stressful

To ease the potential negative impacts associated with the return to the office, the most critical factor to understand is that (putting aside the stressors surrounding COVID), **the change in itself will be a significant cause of distress.**

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# Have an Open and Honest Dialogue

As an organisation, you should focus on facilitating an open dialogue with your employees where they feel safe to feedback on how they are feeling.

Acknowledging that the transition is stressful will normalise the experience and help promote an environment where employees can be open and honest about how they feel.

**Continuously check-in with them** to make sure that they understand you are there for support.

**Try to be as flexible as possible and see how best you can accommodate their needs.**



## Warning Signs

**It is important to understand that people may not want to admit to themselves that they are concerned about returning to the office.**

Instead, they may transfer their worries and concern into other areas of their work life.

If you notice these signs, it could indicate distress. They could seem pessimistic or negative. They could just seem uncomfortable in the situation.

There may be direct complaints of worry, anxiety or the feeling of being overwhelmed.



## Spotting Issues Early

While promoting an open and honest dialogue is essential, it's fair to say that not everyone feels comfortable talking about their concerns about returning to the office.

Therefore, it is important to stay vigilant and look for signs that people are struggling. Typically, changes in a person's usual behaviour are a good indicator that something is wrong.

### Some signs to look out for:

**A decrease in productivity and creativity**

**Being socially withdrawn from the team**

**No energy, drive or motivation for the work**

**Increase the number of sick days taken**



# Make Wellbeing Part of Your Managers' Toolkit

As a team leader, having healthy conversations and handling employee distress is part of the job. However, they are not easy conversations to have and require specific skills and experience to get right.

**Taking part in a mental health first aiders course or coaching development programme should be part of every manager's development.**

These courses are excellent for providing the soft skills necessary to successfully help employees to overcome any fears or concerns they may have.

**Some top tips include:**

If you've picked up that somebody is in distress you can indicate to them that you're concerned or that you sense a little bit of worry.

Ensure you remain non-judgemental as you listen to what you are being told and accept that this is how the person feels.

If you feel that someone needs support, you should refer them to your mental well-being services.

# Managing Workplace Stress

While the move back to the office will likely be a cause of stress, it is not the only factor affecting the productivity and mental wellbeing of your people.

Work induced stress was with us long before the pandemic hit and has had and will continue to be a source of adverse effects on your people's wellbeing.

It's important to manage the stress and ensure you are taking care of your employees' overall mental health.

**The next few pages will focus on ways in which you can do that.**



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# Set Boundaries

**Setting boundaries is an important way to manage stress and prevent burnout.**

When you set boundaries, you are clarifying roles and responsibilities and ensuring that people stay within them.

It is crucial for you to set these boundaries as it helps in preserving physical and emotional wellbeing.

Boundaries allow you to be more productive and efficient in your role. You can ensure your people's focus and your business's resources are utilised in the best way, without spreading them too thin.

An important boundary to set in the workplace is personal boundaries. By giving people time to process, connect with themselves and relax, it allows everyone to have a healthy work-life balance.



# Stay Organised

**Ensuring that your people are organised is an important tool to help them manage their workload.**

If they have a number of important tasks to complete but don't know where to start, it can become overwhelming and cause anxiety.

Creating a schedule in accordance with the priority of the task allows people to efficiently manage and prepare for the day ahead.



# Steer Clear of Multitasking

Multitasking has always been seen as an effective method for managing one's work more efficiently. However, this is not the case.

Research shows that multitasking reduces accuracy and slows people down.

It is more beneficial for employees to complete the task at hand and only then move on to the next task.



## Promote Breaks to Fuel the Body

When they are busy and have multiple deadlines, people can often forget to drink water, eat food or even go to the loo.

Not doing so, adds to the stress they feel and is counterproductive to a their ability to efficiently and effectively complete tasks.

Promoting regular breaks and ensuring people take them is critical to maintaining a healthy and productive working environment.



# Managing Conflict

Certainly, conflict between team members can be uncomfortable and unproductive.

However, it is virtually impossible to avoid conflict in the workplace as we are humans with emotional triggers and biases.

The most effective ways to manage conflict are as follows:



## Active Listening

It's important not to formulate your own opinions of the situation but rather listen to the information presented to you.

You may **not always agree with a team member but it is crucial that you try to understand** the situation from their perspective.

## Remain Impartial

A strong manager is self-aware and should be able to pick up on their own biases. They should not let these biases impact the situation and rather **view it from a neutral perspective**.

## Respect Differences

Conflict is **never a plain and simple situation**. It's important to understand the differences and opinions that each individual involved has.

Understanding each individual's differences will help you better manage conflict in general.

# Practise Empathy

Empathy is about seeing the world through the eyes of someone else and understanding and accepting their point of view.

To manage conflict you must acknowledge how the person is feeling and not dismiss it.

## Timing

**Knowing when to intervene or address conflict is also key to managing it.**

Address it too soon and it might negatively impact the relationship between colleagues.

However, leave it too long and it could create a toxic working environment.



# How to Give Critical Feedback

An important part of being a good leader is the ability to give critical feedback to your team members constructively.

This is a crucial part of developing a team and should happen regularly.

However, as a leader, it can be difficult to know where to start with the process of giving feedback constructively.

In the following pages are some top tips to assist you with this process.





# Provide Balanced Feedback

Don't only focus on the negative or the positives when providing feedback to a team member.

An important part of constructive feedback is to provide it to team members directly after the project or when the team member has done something that needs improvement.

Instead of making the team member feel that they have been reprimanded, **make it a conversation.**

This may sound obvious but **it is the best approach.**



## Be Specific

Feedback given to employees should not only highlight the areas for improvement but should **include details on how they can improve and guidance offered on ways to develop.**

## Listen

After providing your employee with feedback, give them the opportunity to respond.

Making the feedback session a conversation allows the employee to voice their concerns and **explore mutual solutions moving forward.**

## Focus on the Behaviour

It's important to focus on the behaviour that has led to the feedback session and not the personality of the person.

Work does not need to become personal. **Remain factual.** This avoids creating feelings of resentment or guilt.

If the feedback session is constructive it allows employees to see their errors and **encourages them to work achieve their potential.**

# These Ideas will Pay Dividends

As a manager you might not be able to alleviate everyone's concerns because we all approach the **same things** with a **different mindset**.

However, providing a **space where team members feel heard and supported**, while doing what you can within the professional space to make their lives easier will pay dividends.

Building that **relationship with your team** is incredibly important and having those softs skills so that you can address these interpersonal relationships at work will be the best way of ensuring your team is **healthy and thriving**.



## We're Ready to Help

Your team's mental wellbeing is everything. Give them the support they need through Plumm, the all in-one workplace mental wellbeing solution for **any goal, anytime, anywhere.**

With Plumm, team members are empowered with **unlimited access to on-demand mental wellbeing support** through a global network of accredited therapists and coaches, wellbeing courses, guided meditations and live workshops – **all in one place.**

To learn more or to schedule a personalised demo, visit us at [plummhealth.com](https://plummhealth.com)

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